

# east polk Ledger

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## PCC Professor: Art, Teaching Are Natural

Vilas Tonape to demonstrate portrait painting in gallery on Friday

By **DONNA KELLY**  
SPECIAL TO THE LEDGER

WINTER HAVEN | Ask Vilas Tonape about painting and he is likely to discuss anatomy, grammar or geometry before canvas and paints.

"If you can draw a box, you can draw a face," Tonape said, intense eyes searching for understanding in his listeners. "You have to decipher these shapes on a face or a vase or a tree."

Tonape, 39, an award-winning artist who recently joined the faculty at Polk Community College, has a passion for art that is equaled

by a desire to teach others to paint. Like the shock of azure blue or scarlet that emphasize the humanity in his portraits, his dry sense of humor creates an unexpected twinkle in his deep brown eyes.

"These are not hands. One box, two box, three box — there's your hand right there," he said with a wry smile as he looks at a finger in a nearby portrait hanging in an exhibit of his work at Polk Community College.

He makes it sound as easy as one, two, three.

"Most instructors won't correct and say a knuckle bone is wrong because they don't know," he mused, illustrating a need for both instructors and their students to be schooled in anatomy.

Several pieces in the exhibit were created with teaching in mind — sketched beside a face one might find a series of shapes done in pencil where he was demonstrating how to make a nose or mouth or eye.

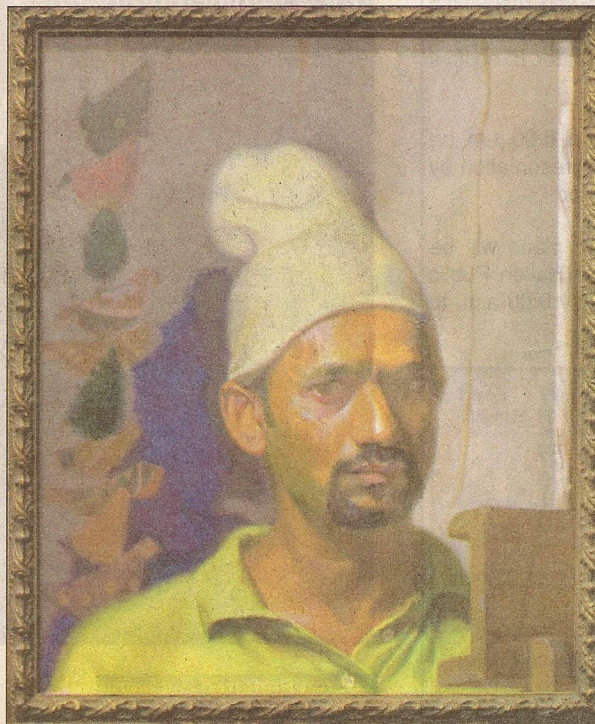
Tonape will demonstrate his portrait painting skills to culminate his one-man exhibit from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Friday in the Fine Arts Gallery at the Winter Haven cam-

pus of Polk Community College.

A natural born artist whose talent was nurtured and skills honed at the Sir J.J. School of Art at the University of Bombay in his native India, Tonape didn't intend to become a teacher of art.

But after graduation he was offered a fellowship teaching art at the university and he discovered that teaching, too, came naturally to him.

"I just liked it," he said, simply. "I started enjoying being with students so much. When you start seeing growth in a student, it's like a million-dollar reward."



"INDIC CHEF," an oil-on-canvas painting by PCC art professor Vilas Tonape, is part of the artist's one-man exhibit that ends Friday with a live demonstration of portrait painting techniques.

He was offered a full scholarship to Texas Christian University, where he served as a teaching assistant and offered classes to art teachers while he completed his Masters of Fine Arts in painting.

"Education is very important to

me," Tonape said.

While in Texas, he developed an art program designed to guide art teachers to a higher level so they can better inspire their students.

He has plans to start a similar program through Polk Community College.

But don't expect any textbooks — he doesn't use them.

He orally explains a project and then he shows the students how to do it in a live demonstration.

"How can you explain the nose is like a box unless you show them?" he said with amusement.

He said students have had mixed reactions to his methods, which are intense, precise and serious.

He started the semester with approximately 90 students. Now he is down to 75 or so.

But those who remain sing his praises, from those who have been painting for years to those who began this semester.

"He takes into account who has painted before and who hasn't," said Deanna Burger, who is new to painting. "He teaches you little things and all of a sudden, it just clicks."

Tonape's excitement about Burger's progress is evident. He has her pull out her first painting and then her most recent endeavor.

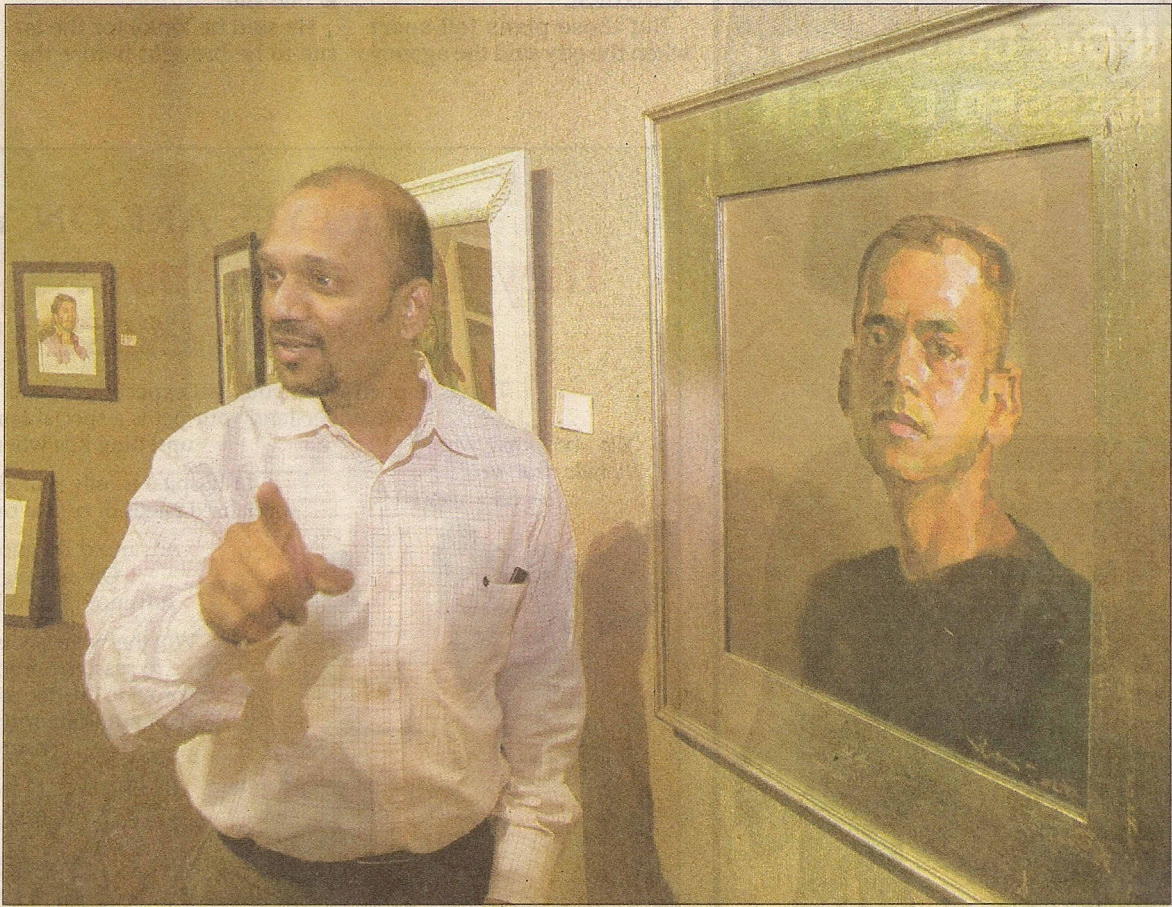
"Look at the difference," he said, obviously impressed with her improvement.

But he's not a pushover.

Sophomore Elizabeth Firth describes him as passionate and enthusiastic but bluntly honest.

"He's very up-front. He will tell you it's not good. He will tell you if

[ PLEASE SEE ARTIST, F5 ]



PIERRE DUCHARME | LEDGER PHOTOS

**VILAS TONAPE**, professor of Art at Polk Community College, displays some of his own work at the college's Fine Arts Gallery on the Winter Haven campus this week.

## Artist

[ CONTINUED FROM F1 ]

you're going in the right direction," she said as she worked on her self-portrait in front of a mirror. "I've learned a lot this term."

Both students mentioned his availability to students and were delighted when Tonape offered to open his studio on Saturdays so they could practice.

Art Professor Gary Baker has been teaching all kinds of art and humanities classes at the college for 31 years. He believes Tonape brings something different, new and exciting to the department.

"As an artist, he has a fantastic ability to paint. His paintings aren't just academically wonderful, but they express

a sense of the soul coming through — an unexpected quality gives it life," he said. "There's something bright and colorful shining through."

Baker said, that while PCC has always been a strong paint-

ing school, Tonape is making it even more so.

"We're going to have a bit of a Renaissance happening here in Polk County," Baker said. "Vilas is taking us in another direction."